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Rock is blooming at Maples Inn

Suburban spot boosts local talent

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ of The Gazette

The Maples Inn is 75 years old, and yet here it is — blasting with the today sounds of rock music. Located on Lakeshore Road in Pointe Claire, it has become one of the best locales around the city for presenting local talent.

Montreal is not a city that can brag about how its night spots support home-towners. So perhaps it is appropriate that a suburban club can boast the biggest array of anglophone talent.

It has become the English counterpart to the Hotel Nelson's Eveche Club, which for years has been a purveyor of bright francophone performers.

"We're the top presenter of rock in the province," says manager Arthur Dullen, who previously managed the now-defunct Mikrol Club on Stanley St. and has presented a few shows at Place des Arts. "By next spring we should be amongst the top three clubs in Canada as showcases for top Canadian talent."

Atmosphere

In contrast to the cramped divey that rock is used to, the Maples has more of a California atmosphere to it. The ceilings are high, the old wood panelling bodes well for the acoustics, the view of the stage is uncluttered, and the checkered drapes match the the tablecloths.

There is a jukebox fully stocked with oldies and goodies (from the Stones, Beatles, Fleetwood Mac to Jimi Hendrix and 'In the Mood' by Glenn Miller), pinball machines and a peanut machine that works.

The Maples has become a rallying point for Montreal musicians, professional or amateur. The members of April Wine are known to hang out there, as well as musicians from such legendary old groups as the Haunted and the Rubble — such a John Pimm and Bob Burgess, who have formed a new group called Windjammer.

"It's the only place around where you can hear what's happening locally," says Brian Kenney, who himself is an aspiring rock hopeful. "It's about time we had a place where we could compare notes."

The Maples may well be a bastion for the English rockers (the French group "17 18" received a rocky reception at their engagement), but the message has spread to the other culture, resulting in a booking of the newly-augmented Offenbach, for years the top French heavy-rock band in Quebec.

"There will be line-ups for that one," beams Dullen. "Offenbach is a band that can relate to our audience."

It is an audience that has prided itself on discovering music, particularly the likes of the Big City Band, Lyrock, and Mango — all groups without recording contracts but heavy word-of-mouth reputations.

"It's the most critical club, too," raves Dullen. "When Frank Zappa played at the Forum we suffered heavily."

Indeed, you can see patrons wearing buttons that say 'DISCO SUCKS' on their lapels.

This week there's a Toronto band, Songship, performing for the locals, who are paying more than passing interest because the drummer of the group, Bruce Moffet, is the brother of April Wine's guitarist Gary Moffet. The sextet is smooth and swings with jazz-funk flavorings.

Next week, it's Eros, a group heavily into the Pink Floyd trip. The week after, there's the longawaited arrival of Lavender Hill Mob, one of a handful of Montreal acts with an American recording contract.

Guitar's rags are riches

MIKE REGENSTREIF for The Gazette

Affectations of the acoustic guitar take note: Eric Schoenberg, one of the absolute masters of the instrument is in town through tomorrow night at the Yellow Door Coffee House.

New Yorker Schoenberg is best known as the most accomplished adapter of Scott Joplin piano rags to the guitar. In his opening set last night he played a little bit of ragtime as well as traditional folk tunes from the U.S. and Ireland, country music from the 1920s, silent movie soundtrack music and a pop tune or two from the Beatles.

Schoenberg takes to the stage with an almost nervous, low key manner. He adjusts the microphones and starts to explain a little bit about his style of playing, he tunes his guitar until every string is perfect and then goes on to introduce the song he's about to play.

If it sounds like Schoenberg is a frustrating performer, it's because he is. He takes a long time with his tuning and he really doesn't do a very good job of entertaining between songs.

But, when he starts to play it's all worthwhile.

The noises of the melodies just sing out from his guitar. He plays with just six strings, the kind of music one might expect from two or three guitarists.

Osmonds get studio

Mormon Church President Spencer Kimball (centre) got a warm embrace from singers Marie and Donny Osmond this week, after he offered a dedicatory prayer at a new $1.5 million television studio built by the Osmond family. Taping of the 'Donny and Marie Show' will begin in the new studio — located in Orem, Utah — in about two weeks. Kimball said the singers should use television to spread the gospel of their church.

Juster's 'amour' is just banal

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ of The Gazette

Diane Juster returned to Place des Arts last night, with a show designed to demonstrate what an honest, sincere, caring femme fatale she is.

The orchestral arrangements, including a six-piece choir, surrounded her with a tremendously self-important light. Her lyrics wafted out with banality piled upon banality on the subject of ... amour.

She looked the part, too. Juster wore a white sequined gown (very pure) and a blue one with severe decolletages on both back and front.

As her soft breathy voice moaned through the bombast, she plunked away on piano as if in imitation of Liberace or Ferrante & Teicher. Melodrama reigned supreme.

The trouble with Juster is that she is so sensitive that she winds up sounding synthetic. The cliches abound in her songs, to the accompaniment of some very dreary soundtracks — the kind they use in 'B' movie romances.

As she groped her way through her material, the audience was with her every bit of the way.

No doubt her current appearance — she made her debut at PdA about a year ago — is more assured than her first, but the 'feeling' was the same: A formulaic package of pop clichés, strewn with phoney hopes and vacant platitudes.

However, she comes across as perfect as a greeting card and her audience appreciated her gestures. She continues through Saturday night.

Lombardo's health stable

HOUSTON — (UPI) — Band leader Guy Lombardo was in critical but stable condition yesterday with a lung, heart and kidney problem that have complicated his recovery from major arterial surgery five weeks ago.

"He appears to have a pulmonary problem associated with some kidney and heart failure," said a spokesman for noted heart surgeon Dr. Michael E. DeBakey.

Canadian-born Lombardo, 75, a 40-year New Year's Eve tradition for millions, had a weakened and ballooned section of a major blood vessel removed by DeBakey Sept. 23.

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